

## EXHIBIT 18

# Opinion | Mike Pompeo cozies up to Saudi Arabia while U.S. citizens are imprisoned

*Alia al-Hathloul, Ali AlAhmed and Areej AlSadhan*

Last summer, when the [American rapper A\\$AP was tried](#) in a Swedish court on assault charges, President Donald Trump dispatched his special envoy for hostage affairs *to Sweden*.

This week, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has traveled to Saudi Arabia, where our family members are just some of the U.S. citizens and relatives of U.S. citizens being held by the government on spurious charges, denied due process and even tortured. Why is there no sign the [hostage envoy is accompanying Pompeo](#) on his trip to Riyadh?

As long as this culture of impunity persists, no American in Saudi Arabia is safe. And we should not trust Saudi forces to stand alongside our troops.

We join [Republican and Democratic members of Congress](#) who have urged Pompeo to raise the case of [Saudi American physician Walid Fitaihi](#) who — after a brutal detention — has been barred, along with his family, from leaving the kingdom until after his trial on vague charges relating to his obtaining of U.S. citizenship and alleged ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. But we want pressure and attention to be brought to our loved ones, as well.

Pompeo has pledged to raise human rights with the Saudis during his three-day trip, which ends Friday. But the U.S. government has shown little willingness to go beyond lip service for these hostages of the Saudi regime. We need our officials, starting with the secretary, to act now — decisively and without reservation — to secure the release of citizens or relatives of citizens whom they are in office to serve.



But U.S. officials seem to assume America's long-term interests are too valuable to risk alienating or weakening the Saudi royal family, which enjoys close ties with Trump's inner circle. Indulging this autocratic and unstable regime not only punishes the domestic activists who most uphold American values, it also undermines the very reliability of any joint military or business undertakings.

Such military and business ventures are agenda items U.S. officials have been much more eager to pursue, but they do so at great cost in moral authority and risk to our interests, even narrowly defined. As long as this culture of impunity persists, no American in Saudi Arabia is safe. And we should not trust Saudi forces to stand alongside our troops who defend U.S. interests and Saudi sovereignty in the Middle East.

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Our relatives' stories are well known to the Department of State, yet it has done almost nothing on their behalf. Our loved ones, and many others like them, are neither revolutionaries nor agents of foreign powers. Their only crime has been to fulfill the fundamental human yearning to be heard. The government of Saudi Arabia has blatantly violated these universal principles.

Loujain al-Hathloul. Marieke Wijntjes / Reuters file

Alia al-Hathloul: My sister

[Loujain al-Hathloul](#), one of the most recognized Saudi women rights activists, is my sister. She has endured physical and [sexual abuse at Saudi prisons](#) since May 2018, just as the [regime granted a few of the universal rights](#) for which she long advocated. I was born in Wisconsin, and I hope that my government will stand up for my Saudi-born sister — and for core American values. Even as women have been allowed some basic freedoms, such as

the right to drive, Loujain awaits her next court appearance for promoting women's rights and having contact with foreign journalists and organizations like Amnesty International.

Badr Al-Ibrahim Family Photo

Ali AlAhmed: My cousin

Bader al-Ibrahim, an Oregon native and U.S. citizen, was arrested in Riyadh in April 2019, placed in solitary confinement and denied access to a lawyer or contact with his family. My cousin has yet to be charged with any crime. He is a respected physician and journalist who has written extensively on Sunni-Shiite relations and women's rights, while I have worked for the past 15 years as a human rights activist to promote political reform in Saudi Arabia.

Abdulrahman Al-Sadhan. Family Photo

Areej AlSadhan: My brother

Abdulrahman AlSadhan is a 35-year-old humanitarian aid worker who was seized by Saudi Arabia's secret police in March 2018 from his office at the Saudi Red Crescent Society. As his sister, a U.S. citizen living in San Francisco, I have spent every day since then trying to find out where he is, what he has been charged with and how he is being treated. Saudi officials tell us only that he is "under investigation," but they have prohibited contact with his family or legal counsel.

After repeated visits to the State Department and efforts by representatives in Congress, in early February my family received a brief phone call from Abdulrahman. All he managed to communicate was that he is alive and being held in the notorious maximum-security al-Ha'ir prison near Riyadh.

This small success shows that public pressure works.

High-ranking U.S. officials need to speak out about these cases and demand concrete action from the Saudi authorities — present their evidence, allow the accused legal counsel and permit family visits.

And our congressional representatives should put the full weight of their considerable influence to work for us and our families. Hold hearings. Pass resolutions of censure. Make clear to the Saudi government that its blatant disregard for the basic rights of American citizens and their relatives will come at a painful cost to the bilateral relationship.

Prison in Saudi Arabia is no picnic. Conditions are harsh. Mistreatment and torture are routine, as is retaliation against relatives of the incarcerated for rocking the boat. The Saudi authorities have erected walls of silence, obfuscation and downright obstruction in the hope that international outrage will wane and the storm of criticism will pass.

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We ask the secretary of state to go beyond mentioning what he called "that issue" — the release of an American captive — during his meetings this week and to speak their names as he pushes for their freedom: Walid, Loujain, Bader, Abdulrahman. They deserve the same intensive U.S. efforts as their counterparts [being held in China and Iran](#).

Saudi Arabia holds numerous other American citizens, friends, colleagues and relatives in similar circumstances. Unlike us, they choose to stay silent in order to protect their loved ones from further persecution, and we respect their decision. They also doubt Washington will ever act in a meaningful way, but they are with us in spirit, for together we must fight.